



2001 Annual Report

Wisconsin's Small Business Environmental Council

Who Are We?

- Small Business Environmental Council
- Began meeting in 1994
- One of the three components of the Small Business Clean Air Assistance Program administered by Department of Commerce
- Authorized under s. 507 of the Clean Air Act Amendments and implemented under s. 560.11, Wisconsin Statutes
- Nine members appointed for three year terms by either the majority and minority leaders of State Assembly and Senate, the Governor, and the Secretary of Commerce and WDNR
- Members represent small business owners and the public

How Are We Funded?

- Program receives no federal funding
- Supported by state air permit fees for expenses

What Are Our Responsibilities?

- Meet regularly to discuss environmental issues affecting small businesses in Wisconsin
- Review and comment on the effectiveness of information and assistance provided to small business by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR)
- Comment on whether information is understandable to laypersons
- Review new regulations to see if they meet the Regulatory Paperwork Reduction Act criteria
- Convey difficulties encountered by small businesses trying to comply with regulations

2001 HIGHLIGHTS:

Organization

The Council began meeting in 1994. Beginning in 2000, the council nominated a council chair and vice-chair. Throughout 2001 structural elements, membership participation, and meeting schedules as well as other issues like potential outside activities and tools to solicit input from other small businesses have been defined and documented. The council guidelines will be approved by the members in early 2002.

Regulatory Input

Federal bills S. 207 and HR 203 raised concerns with council members. Letters were sent to the Congressional Representatives or Senators as appropriate to convey the council's concerns. S. 207, the Energy Efficient Buildings Incentives Act, while important because of energy resource issues today, was too prescriptive to work nation wide. The council suggested that block grants to states, to allow them to start programs that meet the needs of their geography and climate, would be more efficient. HR 203 was a proposal for a pilot program to provide regulatory assistance through the Small Business Development Centers. Such a proposal would be duplicative of the assistance currently provided by the Small Business Assistance Programs created under s. 507 of the Clean Air Act Amendments. The council proposed that duplication of these existing services would be inefficient and funding would be better spent helping all the Small Business Assistance Programs expand their programs.

One council member was selected to participate on the DNR's Green Tier Advisory Committee during 2000-2001. To provide a broader range of small business input to the Advisory Committee, the council initiated a focus group of small businesses to discuss the benefits and drawbacks to the proposed Green Tier concept. Elements important to small business were: financial and technical assistance for implementing an Environmental Management System (EMS); promoting benefits of EMS to small business and to communities to provide true incentive; and increasing time to test out and adopt innovative compliance solutions. The primary concern of the council this year was to ensure the legislation maintain the elements they had suggested to the Green Tier Advisory Committee making it beneficial to all businesses in Wisconsin.

Business Concerns

Many small businesses and municipalities have been provided free education on recycling programs through the UW Extension Solid and Hazardous Waste Education Center. Recent budget cuts eliminated the funding to UW Extension to provide such assistance. Since this was one key benefit businesses received from paying the business tax on recycling, the council expressed concern that funding was taken away. Other waste disposal fees could still provide for such assistance programs. The Council's Corner, a regular column in the Advisor Newsletter printed quarterly by the Small Business Clean Air Assistance Program, was used to request input from businesses on this issue.

Smaller businesses never before regulated by state or federal agencies may be impacted by the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments. Steps have been taken to address the concerns of small businesses as regulations are created, promulgated and enforced.

The Wisconsin Small Business Environmental Council, a component of the state's Small Business Clean Air Assistance Program, provides a chance for small business owners to speak out. Appointed by the Governor, State Assembly and Senate, council members comment on the fairness and effectiveness of WDNR and EPA regulations pertaining to small businesses.

The Small Business Environmental Council provides a forum for rule makers to gain information on the impact rules have on smaller businesses. Many groups have come to value the opinions of the Council.

EVERY PROGRAM A PARTNERSHIP

Our Membership:

Council members want to assist other small businesses by acting as mentors. Based on their different experiences in dealing with environmental regulations, they can offer advice or refer a business to resources to help them find their way.

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Each Small Business Assistance Program is comprised of three parts:

- A technical assistance component to provide the detailed help that small businesses need.
- An ombudsman to advocate on behalf of small businesses within the regulatory environment.
- A Compliance Assistance Panel made up of small business owners and representatives to consult and advise on program content.

Other WI programs with which we build working partnerships include:

- Trade Associations
- UW Extension Solid and Hazardous Waste Education
- Small Business Development Centers
- Other state and local agencies

Members reach out to other business organizations to share information about environmental programs and services. Chambers of Commerce have been one good resource to provide assistance to businesses on regulations, where one member is a volunteer consultant to a Chamber on regulatory issues. A council member, who also belongs to the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), presented information to that organization about environmental regulatory requirements, focusing on air regulations. One member has given presentations about the recently formed National Compliance Advisory Panel (CAP) to the national conferences for both the Small Business Assistance Programs/Small Business Ombudsmen and the Compliance Assistance Providers Forum. These presentations were performed as part of the member's role as Vice Chair of the National CAP. The council is exploring the development of new tools to reach a wider audience that needs to hear about regulatory assistance available to small businesses in Wisconsin. This will be a key focus for the council's activities in 2002.

Find out what is going on with the WI Small Business Environmental Council by visiting www.wienvirohelp.com, contacting CleanAir@commerce.state.wi.us or calling 1-800-HELP BUSINESS (1-800-435-7287).